

## **Arizona's Early Childhood Professional Standards**

During 2012, a statewide group of early childhood stakeholders, convened by First Things First and functioning as a working group of The BUILD Initiative, engaged in a 12-month collaborative planning process. The working group developed Arizona's Early Childhood Professional Development Framework and Two-Year Strategic Plan to develop Arizona's early childhood professional development system. Standards play a critical role in the early childhood professional development system. Early educators, professional development providers, faculty, and policy-makers must know what young children, and their teachers are expected to know and be able to do; and what constitutes a high-quality program. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC ) Blueprint recommends that standards include educator competencies for all early childhood professionals regardless of role or work setting, and that policies regarding standards include language to ensure they are aligned and integrated with licensing and certification requirements across state agencies.

### **What is the Arizona Early Learning Workforce Knowledge and Competencies?**

The Arizona Early Learning Workforce Knowledge and Competencies are the professional standards that summarize the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for professionals across the sectors of early care and education, early intervention, mental health, physical health and social services/child welfare working with expectant parents, infants, toddlers, and their families. The competencies are connected and aligned with the following core documents:

- NAEYC Professional Development Standards
- Infant & Toddler Developmental Guidelines
- Early Learning Standards (AZ-ELS)
- Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten
- Council for Exceptional Children
- AZ Common Core Standards for Kindergarten?
- AZ Professional Teacher Standards
- Quality First Ratings Scale (AZ Quality Improvement and Rating System)

The competencies include standards in the following areas:

1. Child Growth and Development
2. Child Observation & Assessment
3. Effective Interactions (Teacher-Student and Student-Teacher)
4. Curriculum and the Learning Environment
5. Families & Community Partnerships
6. Program Management
7. Health, Safety, & Nutrition
8. Culture
9. Professionalism, Professional Development, and Technical Assistance

## **Why Does Arizona Need a System of Early Childhood Professional Standards?**

The Arizona Early Learning Workforce Knowledge and Competencies inform intentional professional development approaches that ensure that young children and their families receive services targeted to their unique developmental needs. Professional standards can help stabilize the workforce when they are used as the basis for credentials and professional milestones.

## **What is the Status of Early Childhood Professional Standards in Arizona?**

Arizona has a well-developed system of program- and child-level standards and guidelines that include the Early Learning Standards (AZ-ELS), Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, and Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten. To ensure system integration and alignment, standards and guidelines are incorporated into the Quality First Ratings Scale. Educators credentialed through the Arizona Department of Education must meet the teaching competencies required for the credential (i.e., the Early Childhood Certificate (Birth-8) or the Early Childhood Special Education Certificate (Birth-5). Currently, however, Arizona does not have educator competencies that apply to all sectors serving children Birth-8.

## **How are other states addressing Early Childhood Professional Standards?**

The 2011 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Grant required states who proposed improvements to their Professional Development systems to either have or develop a system of early childhood standards including a robust Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. At least 37 states have adopted tiered WFKC frameworks. Some states include a variety of components (such as career ladder or lattice) within their educator competencies. Others have produced stand-alone materials. California, for example, is developing videos that show educators enacting the competencies in real-life early childhood settings. Colorado has a separate instructors' guide that helps Professional Development providers develop curriculum aligned with the competencies.

## **What are the recommendations for Arizona's system of Early Childhood professional standards?**

The Building Arizona's Early Childhood Professional Development System: System Framework and Two-Year Strategic Plan recommends the development of workforce knowledge and competencies that build on previous work in Arizona and other states, and aligns with the NAEYC early childhood teacher competencies.